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**Excerpt from the
Monday, January 14, 2002
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
220 City Hall
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415
4:30 p.m.**

PUBLIC HEARING

Abdirizak Bihi, 1530 6th St S, Riverside Plaza Apartment, indicated that most of the people with him at the meeting lived there. He was a community advocate in the neighborhood with NRP and the Somali community. They hadn't known about this situation until recently when a letter was sent by Planning staff about this hearing. They met four times in the community. It was a community with a language and cultural barrier about how the system works. It was difficult for them to organize and come this far. They were at the meeting to oppose the application (by Baja Riverside). They had done a good job, but they were told that it had to be continued. It was difficult for them in terms of resources and in terms of getting all of these people back together again. People had left their children, they had left their jobs and their schools. They made a great effort and they begged for the opportunity to be heard.

President Martin stated that she would allow two people to talk. The Commission was not going to make a decision at this meeting. She understood that a number of people that were there were concerned about a liquor license. This Commission does not deal with liquor licenses. Another body of the City deals with liquor licenses. She would give them the name and phone number of the person who does liquor licensing.

Mr. Bihi responded that the liquor license was one of the issues.

President Martin indicated that the part that the Planning Commission would deal with was the site plan only. She would let them speak at the appropriate time.

7. 1501 (restaurant) and 1507 (parking lot) 6th Street South (6th Ward - BZZ-433, Site Plan Review)

Application by Baja Riverside for site plan review of a restaurant and bar. (Staff, Jim Voll)

Jim Voll presented the staff report. He indicated that there seemed to be a concern about alcohol being served. He understood that the site had always had a beer license. You can have beer and wine there now, but they were applying for a liquor license. The issue of whether they would get a liquor license or not had not been decided. That would be decided by a separate committee after it is through the Planning Commission. They wouldn't go forward with the liquor license until they knew whether the Commission approved the site plan. Nothing the Planning Commission did would either approve or deny the liquor license.

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The public hearing was opened.

Abdirizak Bihi, 1530 6th St S, Riverside Plaza Apartment, indicated that he worked with the community as an advocate and also with the Somali community. There are a huge number of East African immigrants that have come into that neighborhood recently. This site used to be a restaurant a couple of years ago. The whole face of the neighborhood has changed. It is over populated right now. He lives only a few feet from this site. He can see it from his window. He and many there are the people who deal with the social problems of this community, who have language and cultural barriers, who are trying to find housing in Minneapolis. This is a spot where there are a lot of restaurants, groceries and a huge number of businesses. In their neighborhood there were nine bars, night clubs and liquor stores. There are a huge number of teenagers that have been saved from the civil war. It took a lot of effort by the American people to get them here safely. They were dropping out of high school and hanging out on the street and becoming criminals because of alcohol consumption in the neighborhood. This site is totally different from the 16 bars already. The bars are on Cedar and Riverside. This one is right in the face of our homes. There are about 14 buses that pick up hundreds of children ranging from 4 1/2 years to 17 years that go to school. There are about 65 buses from the Minneapolis Public Schools that come to this neighborhood every morning and evening and for after school programs. They were already having a huge social problem and there is a lack of resources. All they get is liquor, liquor, liquor in their community. Over 65% of this neighborhood does not consume alcohol. He understood that they were not talking about the liquor license, but the number of children that continuously cross 6th street and 4th Street to the community center and the lack of parking and the huge population in this neighborhood from other places was already causing a lot of problems for them. This business would create a huge amount of traffic. In their meeting with the Governor, Joan Campbell thanked the Somali community in that neighborhood for making the population of the City richer. They would like the Commission to look into their hearts and see where this community was coming from and how much they were struggling and the housing shortage and the language problems that they were having. These people were afraid to come to the meeting, because in Somalia, they used to be tortured if they went to the government center, or they might disappear. It took a lot of effort and bravery to get them to show up to the government center because for 30 years they were being oppressed. This was an opportunity for this community, please consider that.

Commissioner Marsh stated that Mr. Bihi said that this particular restaurant changed the face of the neighborhood. How did it change the face of the neighborhood and do you and your community have a different plan of what you would want to do with this building?

Mr. Bihi replied that they would appreciate getting the chance. They don't have any money or resources and weren't hopeful of getting resources. Right now they were concentrating on the negative impact that this business would have on their community. They were a family based community. Over 55% of the community was single parents headed by a female that does not speak English and doesn't know how the system works and cannot even get on the bus sometimes. Close to half are on assistance and their five years are about up. This business, if it serves alcohol or even becomes a restaurant with a lot of traffic, it impacts our community for many reasons. There is a huge number of

female headed households assistance working part-time jobs at night, especially in City Hall and the Government Center as sanitary engineers or cleaners and they get off the bus on Cedar Avenue and walk home between 11:30 and 1:00 AM. They look different and don't speak the language. There will be a lot of crowds that do not understand the culture of this community and the problems of this community. The West Bankers already know about this community and they welcome them. Those people who would come to this establishment will have totally different understanding. There are some members of the community that were shot upon arrival. Most of the people who create problems don't live there, it is people who come from other places. They come there for the bars. It usually happens over the weekends. There are already enough problems. The particular site is right in our face and homes. There are no other business on 6th Street. All of the businesses and bars are on Cedar Avenue and Riverside. People can enjoy and go to the shops, they want them to be there. This one in particular is right on the bus stop. He had pictures showing hundreds of young children, unescorted waiting for the buses, there is no space to pass. If there is a bar there selling alcohol, can you imagine how much traffic this will cause? If there is alcohol, all of their young children who are having a cultural identity problem because they have been here for awhile and are from another county, they are unemployed because of the September 11th situation, the whole country's economy is going down and they are the worst because they don't speak English. They drop out of high school. A huge number of the households are headed by female parents that don't speak English and have no control over the children. They are hanging out on the street drinking beer and they sell beer to them, they are not even 18. If there is a bar there with a huge number of non-West Bankers in the community, each one driving a car, it will have a huge impact on the community. That was only the tip of the ice berg.

Fadumo Abdi, 1515 4th St S, #810, stated that she was a single mother, most of those women who live in this area lost their husbands in the civil war or those who left their husbands back home. They were moving to Minnesota because it is a place where they thought would be safe and had what they needed. Thank God they got in Minnesota what they wanted. They live in this area because they were close together. This is a place where their community lives and a place where most of the women knew each other back home or friends live together. When one lady goes to a job, she leaves her kids with the other one. That is why they were heavily populated in that area. When they heard that business was going there, it was very dangerous for them as they were women who work at night. Most of the women get up at 1:00 AM - 4:00 AM. She appreciated getting the chance to let them hear their problems. In Minneapolis they have a lot of problems with housing and are moving other places. She appreciated the help so this area would be safe. Most of the women have six children or eight children. When they buses pick up in the morning, the area is very close to this.

Robert Johnson, 1500 6th St. S, stated that he lives in and owns the property directly across the street. This is a 99 year old building across from the subject building which is 98 years old. There are several items of misinformation to correct. Number one, there was a liquor license in this building until one year ago when it was Vinnie's restaurant. It was a Class B liquor license, in fact there has been a Class B liquor license in that building for close to 98 years. It was built as a bar and a restaurant and that is what it has always been. He purchased his property ten years ago and there has always been a liquor license for that restaurant. Number two, the comment about school children boarding

school buses in front of this location was not correct. They boarded the buses one block to the East at the corner of 16th Avenue and 6th Street, not at the corner of 15th Avenue and 6th Street. He lives there and his bedroom faced the street. He heard 30 or 40 buses go by every day. Number three, there was notice. There was a neighborhood review for residents and also a neighborhood review for businesses held on August 15th. The neighborhood review for residents was held in the Pavilion which is part of the Cedars, Minneapolis Public housing authority project. There were handbills and fliers put out and all of the buildings of the Cedars and also across the street at 1530 6th Street South which was the Chase House of Riverside Plaza which was the closest building of Riverside Plaza to 1501 which is about 250 feet away, not right across the street. To the matter of the site plan, he thought the site plan was excellent. He totally supported this project. It was appropriate development around the LRT station. It was totally consistent with the master plan for development around the LRT station which the Commission approved at the last meeting. This has always been a bar and a restaurant, all these years. He was surprised that it was coming up for this sort of review now because the prior times when he owned the property across the street it did not come up for review. He often wondered why he didn't receive a notice that the property was changing hands.

President Martin noted that it was under review now because whenever there was a new owner, the site plan automatically "kicks in." The new Zoning Code did that, that was why it was different this time and it wasn't all of the others.

President Martin noted that the public hearing would be continued to the January 28, 2002 Planning Commission meeting. They would be dealing only with the site plan issue. She would not allow testimony about anything that didn't have to do with the site plan at that point. The person to talk to in the Licensing Department about the liquor license was Grant Wilson, 673-3607. Staff suggested that one or two people meet with him.

Council Member Zimmerman, 6th Ward, indicated that the Commission did what he wanted them to do by postponing it for a couple of weeks. They were already having discussion in his office about what they wanted to do on this. There would be a related development going next door and it was a bigger picture.

Commissioner Young pointed out that she wouldn't be at the next meeting, but she would try to give some written comments or discuss this with another Commissioner some comments she had on the issue.

Commissioner Tucker motioned, Nestingen seconded to continue the public hearing to the January 28, 2002 Planning Commission meeting. Carried.

Commissioner Young wanted to thank the Commission for letting the Somali's speak. She thought it was in the best interest to always make them feel welcome. She worked with a candidate who ran for Mayor from that Community and was able to work with the Somali community. They are new and they are learning. It is in our interest to try to help them.